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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: Kyrgyz Press and Public Opinion Still Overwhelmingly
Pro-Russian in the Georgia Conflict

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Forty days after the beginning of the Georgian conflict, opinions on the conflict in the Kyrgyz media are resoundingly pro-Russian. Reader reactions to an Embassy op-ed indicate that the U.S. version of events has little support. On the contrary, the events in Georgia appear to be deepening anti-American sentiment, as the U.S. is widely blamed for so-called "Georgian aggression." End summary.

40 DAYS LATER: REFLECTING ON THE CONFLICT

¶2. (SBU) September 16th marked the fortieth day anniversary of the beginning of the conflict in Georgia and South Ossetia. (Comment: In the cultures of the post-Soviet states, the fortieth day after death is commemorated.) Kyrgyz newspaper "Moy Mikrorayon," a new, independent paper, published a pro-Russian, analytical article on the conflict and an editorial supporting Russia. In the editorial, it wrote that Russia was "protecting peaceful people from Georgian aggression." Accompanying the editorial were the results of an online public opinion poll, "Should Kyrgyzstan Officially Recognize the Independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia?" The survey resulted in a 94% positive response.

U.S. PORTRAYED AS AN "EMPIRE OF EVIL"

¶3. (SBU) "Beliy Parus," a pro-Russian newspaper, published a series of articles during the month of September calling the U.S. an "Empire of Evil," and claiming thousands of South Ossetians had died at the hands of Georgian "puppets." One article claimed that the U.S. used Georgia in its quest for world domination. The article listed the countries the U.S. has already "attacked" (Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yugoslavia) and those that the U.S. allegedly has its sights on (Uzbekistan, Iran, and China).

READERS DISAGREE WITH EMBASSY OP-ED

14. (SBU) Post placed a Department-approved op-ed on Georgia in the largest daily newspaper, independent "Vecherniy Bishkek." The newspaper published the op-ed on September 3. This article ran directly across from an op-ed by the Russian ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, defending the official Russian position on recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

15. (SBU) On September 8, the newspaper published letters-to-the-editor in response to the op-eds. All seven letters supported the Russian position, saying "The U.S. is determined to destabilize the CIS and Eurasia," "Saakashvili is paid by the State Department," and "In Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yugoslavia, and everywhere, the U.S. has imposed its world order without taking into consideration the opinion of the world community, and despite UN resolutions." Not one letter supported the U.S. version of events.

GEORGIANS: "CLOWNS" IN NEW COLD WAR?

16. (SBU) On September 23, independent, Kyrgyz-language newspaper "Kyrgyz Ruhu" ("Kyrgyz Spirit"), published an article entitled "Georgians are Clowns in the New Cold War," by former Press Secretary for the General Prosecutor's Office and now independent analyst, Toktogul Kakchekeev. The article was very emotional and was "dedicated to the memory of the victims of Georgian aggression in Abkhazia and South Ossetia." The article accused the U.S. of "trying to carve up the world using the knives of colonialism or globalization under the nice sauce of democracy, freedom, human rights, freedom of press, and rule of law. But behind the facade of these attractions there is an eternal rule of redistribution, economic dependence, and loss of real sovereignty."

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FEW COMMENTATORS SUPPORT U.S. POSITION

17. (SBU) There has only been one article in recent weeks that supports the U.S. position on the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Unsurprisingly, the article was published in a Kyrgyz-language newspaper (Comment: Kyrgyz newspapers tend to have more independent voices than the Russian language papers). The article featured an interview with an independent analyst (and alumnus of a Marshall Center program) who compared the situation in South Ossetia with Russia's war in Chechnya: "Chechens wanted independence but were heavily suppressed and remained part of Russia. When Georgians tried to demonstrate the same policy towards Ossetia, they were told they couldn't do it. So, Russia can do it, Georgia cannot. Russia can protect its territorial integrity, Georgia cannot." The article referred to Russian "lies" and "disinformation," saying "We don't get any information from Georgia - we only get information from the Russian media." The article concluded that Russia's harsh treatment of Georgia is retribution for Georgia's desire to join NATO.

18. (SBU) Comment: The pro-Russian reaction to the events in Georgia is unsurprising, given the fact that the overwhelming majority of Kyrgyz get their news from Russia. There are very few public, dissenting voices, and few independent media outlets.

GFOELLER